

CAN Barnet or Hendon break the northern dominance of the FA Trophy? Two of the nearest clubs geographically to Wembley left in the competition, both have a great chance of bringing non-league football's premier prize south for the first time.

Finalists in 1972 when beaten 3-0 by Stafford Rangers, Barnet face a tough first-round task against powerful Rothmans Isthmian League title contenders Wycombe Wanderers at Underhill on Saturday, while Hendon visit Bishop's Stortford, the only side to beat them twice this season!

Barnet's sloping Underhill pitch should not prove any problem for Wycombe, accustomed to their own lop-sided ground at Loakes Park.

Wycombe manager Ted Powell has kept Barnet under observation recently, but Barnet boss Billy Meadows is pursuing his policy of "let them worry about us," and has not troubled to watch Wycombe.

Meadows knows only too well that Wycombe present a formidable obstacle.

"Their record in recent years speaks for itself, and I have a high regard for them," he said. "They will certainly be hard to beat but, with a home draw, the odds favour us. If we put our game together in our best style, we will win."

Fitness could be a key factor in settling the tie between two of the south's leading contenders.

Trainer Albert Walker, who watched Wycombe lose 3-2 at Slough earlier in the season, is determined

that Barnet's squad will be in good shape for this vital encounter.

Said Walker: "Isthmians often get the better of Southern League sides, because they are fitter, faster and compete well."

"Wycombe have all these qualities and more style than most Isthmians. That will make them tougher to beat."

Striker Ray Aggio is recalled by Meadows, who reverts to a 4-3-3 formation. The axe will fall on a mid-field man, either Paul Blackaller or Gary Williams.

"But at last we are beginning to click, and there is no reason why we should not succeed this time," added Quail, who names a squad of 13 for the vital trip to Rhodes Avenue.

Mick O'Donoghue, who showed so much promise at the start of the season, is added to the side which drew at Tilbury last Saturday.

Crippled in the game against Hillingdon last week, George Brooks, one of Hendon's most consistent players this season, is ruled out by the leg injury which could keep him out of action for a month.

Hendon aim to stretch their unbeaten run of seven games without defeat. But Bishop's have a psychological advantage — they were the last team to beat Hendon, 2-1 at Claremont Road back in November.

Hendon, admittedly, were not at their best and missed numerous chances as they allowed Stortford to complete the double.

Stortford have a formidable attacking trio in 13-goal Peter Twigg, seasoned campaigner Eddie Dilsorth, once with Wealdstone, 12, and Kenny Gain also on 12.

Goalkeeper Paul Kitson, who missed Saturday's game with Hayes returns in goal for Bishop's, who may also consider mid-field player Paul Massey, fit after a lengthy injury.

"Though we have completed the double over Hendon we do not by any means belittle their capabilities," said Stortford official Vic Wallis.

"We have always had tight games with Hendon, and this could well be another," he added.

On the Wembley trail

Highspot should be the clash between Fairbrother, Barnet's top scorer with 24 goals, and Alan Phillips, Wycombe's experienced central defender. Phillips helped Hendon gain a shock draw at Newcastle in the FA Cup, and was in the Wycombe side that held mighty Middlesborough.

In the event of a draw, the replay will be at Loakes Park on Tuesday.

Hendon boss Jimmy Quail is mindful of the task which faces him at Bishop's Stortford.

"I view them with considerable respect," said Quail, who watched Stortford beaten 2-1 at Hayes on Saturday.

"They have already beaten us twice this season and recently put it over Enfield.